

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5316

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C O N F I D E N T I A L VALLETTA 0425

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, MT

SUBJ: NATIONALIST'S VIEW OF MINTOFF ROLE ON MALTA

1. ALTHOUGH MOST RECENT INFORMATION INDICATES MINTOFF IS INDEED RECOVERING FROM HIS ACCIDENT, CONCERN ABOUT HIS HEALTH WAS BACKGROUND FOR INTERESTING CONVERSATION AT LUNCH MARCH 4 WITH MARIO FELICE, YOUNG NATIONALIST MP AND SHADOW FINANCE MINISTER.

2. FELICE BEGAN BY SAYING HE WAS UNABLE TO GET ANY SATISFACTORY EXPLANATION OF MINTOFF'S CONDITION, AND HE WAS SO CONCERNED THAT HE PLANNED TO FACE PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY WISTIN ABELA (ONE OF MINTOFF INNER CIRCLE) WITH DEMAND FOR FACTS IN ORDER THAT COUNTRY COULD BE PREPARED FOR EXTENDED ABSENCE OR DISAPPEARANCE OF MINTOFF FROM MALTA POLITICAL SCENE. IF THIS SHOULD HAPPEN, FELICE PREDICTED THAT MLP "EXTREMISTS", LED BY LORRY SANT AND ANTON BUTTIGIEG

WOULD TAKE OVER. (WHEN WE COMMENTED ON BUTTIGIEG'S EXTREMELY MODERATE SPEECH TO LEAGUE OF SOCIALIST YOUTH A FEW DAYS BEFORE, FELICE ASSERTED THIS WAS ONLY WELL-KNOWN TACTIC OF LEFTIST FEINTING TO RIGHT BEFORE HE MOVED SHARPLY TO THE LEFT.)

3. FELICE THOUGHT, HOWEVER, THAT SANT AND BUTTIGIEG WERE NOT CAPABLE TO EXERCISING EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP, AND THAT THERE WOULD

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BE A SERIOUS FRACTIONALIZATION OF LABOR PARTY. MINTOFF WAS ABLE

TO DOMINATE MLP, BUT CABINET MINISTERS WOULD NOT ACCEPT ATTEMPT AT AUTHORIZARIAN PARTY RULE BY ANY OTHER OF THE POTENTIAL LEADERS. IN BRIEF, FELICE THOUGHT THAT IN CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES, MINTOFF'S ABSENCE WOULD BE A DISASTER. HE QUITE SERIOUSLY PROPOSED AS THE BEST SOLUTION A COALITION GOVERNMENT TO DEAL WITH WHAT HE WOULD CONSIDER A NATIONAL CRISIS.

4. IN FURTHER DISCUSSION OF MINTOFF AND HIS GOALS, FELICE BELIEVED THAT MINTOFF IS ATTACHED TO THE IDEA OF CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM. HE CLAIMED MINTOFF HAS TWO SPECIFIC GOALS: FIRST IS TO DO AWAY WITH PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION, AND SECOND TO REMOVE ANY MENTION OF THE CHURCH IN THE CONSTITUTION. FELICE AGREED THAT NEITHER THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT QUESTION NOR THE VOTING AGE WERE OF SUFFICIENT

IMPORTANCE TO LEAD MINTOFF TO AMEND CONSTITUTION ILLEGALLY. ON THE OTHER HAND, FELICE SAID HE AGREED WITH MINTOFF THAT IT WAS WRONG TO "IMPOSE" ON MALTA A CONSTITUTION REQUIRING TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENT FOR AMENDMENT.

5. AS LAST POINT OF INTEREST, WITH REGARD TO ATTEMPTS BY DR. COLOMBO TO CREATE A NEW POLITICAL PARTY, FELICE CLAIMED THAT BUTTIGIEG IS FURIOUS IN LIGHT OF EXCHANGE OF CORRESPONDENCE HE HAD WITH COLOMBO ABOUT TWO YEARS AGO. BUTTIGIEG TOLD FELICE THAT COLOMBO HAD WRITTEN TO HIM TAKING THE LABOR PARTY TO TASK FOR NOT UNDERTAKING A BROAD PROGRAM OF NATIONALIZATION OF PRIVATE ENTERPRISE AND CONFISCATION OF PROPERTY. WHEN BUTTIGIEG WROTE BACK TO ASK WHAT COLOMBO ADVOCATED WITH REGARD TO CHURCH PROPERTY (AT THAT TIME COLOMBO WAS IN A RELIGIOUS ORDER), COLOMBO REPLIED THAT THE CHURCH PROPERTY SHOULD BE THE FIRST TO BE CONFISCATED. FELICE IMPLIED THAT BUTTIGIEG INTENDED TO MAKE THIS CORRESPONDENCE PUBLIC AT SOME POINT.

6. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH FELICE APPEARS TO BE A GOOD NATIONALIST MP, AND IS TRUSTED ENOUGH WITHIN PARTY TO BE ENDOWED WITH SHADOW FINANCE PORTFOLIO, THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT HE HAS CONSIDERABLE ADMIRATION FOR MINTOFF AS A LEADER AND A DOER. HE HAS CLAIMED FOR MONTHS THAT HE SEES MINTOFF QUITE REGULARLY FOR LONG DISCUSSIONS, AND WE HAVE NO REASON TO DOUBT THIS. ON THE OTHER HAND, HE IS PRIVATELY QUITE CONTEMPTUOUS OF NATIONALIST LEADER BORG OLIVIER, AND IT WOULD BE LOGICAL TO INCLUDE FELICE AS A POSSIBILITY IF THERE

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IS ANY TRUTH IN BALDACCHINO'S ASSERTION (VALLETA 0407) THAT TWO MORE NATIONALIST DEPUTIES MIGHT FOLLOW BALDACCHINO ACROSS THE AISLE TO THE LABOR PARTY.GETZ

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